



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

SEP 10 1998

OFFICE OF
THE ADMINISTRATOR

Mr. Robert C. Shinn, Jr.
Commissioner, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
and President, Environmental Council of the States
444 North Capitol Street, N.W. Suite 305
Washington, D.C. 20002

Dear Bob:

Last August, we marked an important milestone on the road to better environmental management when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Environmental Council of the States (ECOS) agreed to the first national set of Core Performance Measures to use in assessing the nation's progress in protecting public health and the environment. While much work remains for EPA, State, and many other experts to develop the best measures possible, the Core Performance Measures represent an important step toward being able to understand how the protection activities we undertake are affecting environmental quality and public health. Our joint efforts have also strengthened our collective ability to respond to the requirements of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) by articulating longer term environmental outcome measures.

EPA appreciates ECOS' support for continued use of these measures for FY 99, as indicated in your June 24, 1998, letter on behalf of ECOS. We especially appreciate the strong commitment ECOS members have made to working with us to improve the measures for FY 2000. We agree that most of the FY 98 measures should continue in place during FY 99, while we work to develop tangible improvements for FY 2000. After all, long-term improvement to the core measures is a critical objective which we share.

Our intention is to finalize the FY 2000 measures by December 31, 1998, so that they will be available to all States in time for their joint planning with the Regions. This will also ensure better consistency with our annual plan and budget submission to the Congress for FY 2000.

The only official changes for FY 99 include minor improvements to the Air and Water measures which have been reviewed by your respective Committees. I have asked the Office of Water to work closely with those few States which are having problems with the FY 99 revisions to the Water measures, and permit them to use the FY 98 measures, if necessary. Generally, States are finding the revised set to be less burdensome, fewer in number, and more directly aligned with the FY 99 activities.

Your letter raises two concerns about the current situation: that EPA has been inconsistent in implementing the flexibility provisions of the Joint Statement on Core Performance Measures, and that we have not made enough progress on reducing the State reporting burden. Let me address both of these points.

Balancing Flexibility and Consistency

One of the most challenging aspects of implementing the Core Performance Measures is balancing the need for uniform national measures with the need to accommodate the circumstances of individual States. Because the measures are intended for use in developing a national picture of environmental progress, EPA presumes that the Core Performance Measures, Associated Reporting Requirements, and Accountability Measures apply to all States. However, under certain circumstances, Regions can adjust a measure that is inappropriate for a particular State. We worked with ECOS to spell out those circumstances in the Joint Statement signed last August. We want Regions to work with their States, and accommodate their needs and circumstances as much as possible, so long as we don't undermine the usefulness of Core Measures. In order to ensure the basic level of consistency that we all seek, Regions are asked to consult with the appropriate NPM as they negotiate these adjustments.

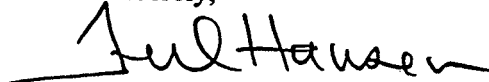
Reducing the Reporting Burden

We share your concern that, despite our joint efforts of the last two years, EPA and States "have not yet made enough progress on reporting and burden reduction." EPA remains committed to working closely with States to reduce the overall reporting burden. I understand that the State/EPA Information Management Workgroup, under the leadership of Brent Bradford and Chuck Fox, has taken on the task of scoping the complex issues of reporting and burden reduction through the development of a white paper to be reviewed extensively through EPA and the ECOS committees prior to your October meeting. Through understanding the dynamics of the problem from both sides, I believe we can jointly chart a course of concrete steps to ensure that we only collect and share the information that has "specific and demonstrable uses" as outlined in the State/EPA Vision and Operating Principles for Environmental Information Management.

Meanwhile, some individual EPA Regions and States have already found ways to reduce the burden of State reporting through direct data-sharing and eliminating less frequently used reports. I encourage States to continue working with their respective Regions on these highly productive burden-reduction projects.

Implementing a system of Core Performance Measures in support of our mutual environmental goals is an important part of our working relationship. It is critical that we work together to promote the effective use of those measures, particularly the newer outcome measures. EPA shares ECOS's strong commitment to improving the information we collect and use to manage environmental programs. We look forward to our continuing dialogue and hard work on this fundamental element of our joint efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fred Hansen", with a horizontal line underneath.

Fred Hansen
Deputy Administrator